

www.nytimes.com

The New York Times
ON THE WEB

June 12, 2001

Bush Will Continue to Oppose Kyoto Pact on Global Warming

By DAVID E. SANGER

WASHINGTON, June 11 — President Bush made clear today that he had no intention of reversing his opposition to a global warming accord supported by the European leaders he will meet with this week. And he strongly suggested that any new accord would have to bind developing nations, especially China and India, to the kind of commitments that would be made by the United States.

In an effort to mollify his European critics in the hours before he left for Spain tonight on his first trip to Europe as president, Mr. Bush acknowledged the severity of the global warming problem and said the United States would "lead the way by advancing the science on climate change." He described several new research initiatives that could mark a potentially significant focusing of American climate study.

But while suggesting a new approach to the issue of global warming, Mr. Bush remained firm in rejecting the 1997 Kyoto accord, noting that it set no standards for major emitters of greenhouse gases, like China and India, while creating mandates for the United States that could prove economically crippling. His aides further argued that the accord — aimed at reducing emissions of greenhouse gases below 1990 levels — was written to make it easier for Europe than for the United States to meet the goals.

Mr. Bush's outright rejection of the treaty two months ago led to an uproar in Europe. While unapologetic about their decision to back away from the accord, White House officials concede that they did a poor job of explaining their objections or their approach to the problem of reducing heat-trapping gases.

So today, Mr. Bush stepped into the Rose Garden with several of his cabinet members and publicly embraced a recent report from the National Academy of Sciences that concluded that temperatures are rising because of human activities. At the same time, he insisted that his rejection of the Kyoto protocol "should not be read by our friends and allies as any abdication of responsibility."

"We will act, learn and act again, adjusting our approaches as science advances and technology evolves," he said. [Excerpts, Page A12.]

In essence, Mr. Bush was arguing that the market should be allowed to solve the problem, with the United States pushing along research "consistent with the long-term goal of stabilizing greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere."

While advocating an attack on the problem of the buildup of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, the president once again rejected the mandates in the Kyoto treaty that the United States and other developed nations cut their emission levels of those gases to well below 1990 levels, a move he said would be economically disastrous for the United States and the world. He offered no concrete alternatives to the Kyoto cutbacks, however, beyond research and the gradual application of new technology. And he reiterated his longstanding pledge that he would not agree to any accord that exempts the developing world. "The world's second largest emitter of greenhouse gases is China," Mr. Bush said, with Vice President Dick Cheney and Secretary of State Colin L. Powell at his side. "Yet China was entirely exempted from the requirements of the Kyoto protocol. India and Germany are among the top emitters. Yet India was also exempt from Kyoto."

Mr. Bush omitted any direct criticism of Europe, even though his aides have been saying, publicly and privately, that the members of the European Union have deliberately manipulated the debate — and unfairly caricatured Mr. Bush as an enemy of good environmental practice — to cover up their political problems coming into compliance with the Kyoto mandates.

Andrew Card, Mr. Bush's chief of staff, told reporters over lunch here today that the target of cutting greenhouse emissions to below 1990 levels was picked with "Machiavellian intent" because it enabled them to count in East Germany just before its economy was collapsing. One result is that Europe must now cut its emissions far less than the United States does, he argued.

Mr. Card argued that Mr. Bush had taken a courageous position that other nations would eventually come to appreciate. "The emperor of Kyoto was running around the stage for a long time naked," he said, "and it took President Bush to say, 'He doesn't have any clothes on.' "

Mr. Bush's statement today only seemed to fuel his disagreements with Europe, even as it was intended to tamp them down. "Everyone will be polite this week, I'm sure," said a senior European diplomat here, "but the standard everyone will be holding him to is how this stacks up against Kyoto. Where is the target? What is the U.S. timetable?"

Moreover, he has probably re-ignited the dispute with the developing world. China, for instance, has managed to reduce its emissions significantly in the last few years, and it argues that the United States has done comparatively little. Chinese officials have already said they view efforts to force stricter controls as part of a move to contain Chinese economic power.

Just as China and India have rejected limiting their economic potential by imposing strict environmental standards, Mr. Bush made clear today that he would not agree to any environmental limits that would slow the economy of either the United States or the world.

"We account for almost 20 percent of the man-made greenhouse emissions," he said. "We also account for about one-quarter of the world's economic output. We recognize the responsibility to reduce our emissions."

But he added that "we also recognize the other part of the story," saying the targets in the Kyoto treaty would "have a negative economic impact, with layoffs of workers and price increases for consumers."

Mr. Bush's statement was dismissed by a range of environmental groups as an effort to evade the issue by promising new scientific initiatives, but leaving unclear how much he was willing to spend, or how long the studies should take.

While Mr. Bush called for a "national climate change technology initiative" today, former members of the Clinton administration said it bore great resemblance to a \$4.5 billion, five-year program they proposed four years ago. Congress never fully financed it, and Mr. Bush's recent budget did not support it.

"It's very weak tea," said David B. Sandalow, the former assistant secretary of state for oceans, environment and science and one of the negotiators of the Kyoto protocol in the last administration. Mr. Sandalow, now a senior fellow at the World Resources Institute, said, "If you were trying to develop a strategy to make sure China and India would not cooperate, you couldn't develop a better one than what Mr. Bush announced today."

What was striking about today's statement, though, was Mr. Bush's extensive discussion of the issue, and his commitment to do something about it — even as he swathed the specifics in a cloud of ambiguities.

He characterized global warming as a serious long-range problem but one whose dimensions were still too little understood.

He tacitly acknowledged that the United States' rejection of the Kyoto accord had estranged the United States from many nations with which it has good relations generally.

Accordingly, Mr. Bush said he would push for new efforts to study global warming and more coordination among research institutions. He called for more money to pay for research into ways to control greenhouse gases.

If some of the president's statements today about technology and America's own advances sounded familiar, it may be because it had echoes of his father's speech nine years ago this week at a major environmental conference in Rio de Janeiro that set the stage for the Kyoto negotiations.

"Let's face it, there has been some criticism of the United States," the first President Bush said at the time. "But I must tell you, we come to Rio proud of what we have accomplished and committed to extending the record on American leadership on the environment. In the United States, we have the world's tightest air quality standards on cars and factories, the most advanced laws for protecting lands and waters, and the most open processes for public participation."

He added, "Now for a simple truth: America's record on environmental protection is second to none."

In the years since, the United States has continued to support research and new technology and to push for limits on automobile exhaust and factory emissions.

By repeating his fidelity today to negotiating with other nations under the 1992 climate treaty signed by his father, Mr. Bush is essentially trying to reset the clock, arguing that Kyoto should be scrapped in favor of a new, market-based accord that did not impose such an onerous economic cost.

But it is far from clear that he can win any converts to that position. Eileen Claussen, president of the Pew Center on Global Climate Change, a nonpartisan group that works with many large corporations seeking to scale back their emissions, said today that she was "confused" about Mr. Bush's political goal.

"He is meeting with Europeans who are doing some very ambitious things to reduce emissions," she said. "Yet what we don't have from him is something that talks about how you go about reducing emissions."

Some of that, Bush administration officials said, is contained in his energy report, issued last month. Mr. Bush, for instance, called for the increased use of nuclear power, because it emits no greenhouse gases. In a sign of how far apart he and the Europeans are, Germany today reached an agreement with its utilities to phase out the use of nuclear power, in part because of the growing problem of disposing of nuclear waste.

Although this will be Mr. Bush's first trip to Europe since taking office, White House aides said today that the president, who critics have said has had little exposure to foreign countries, has made several previous trips to the region.

A White House spokesman, Gordon Johndroe, said Mr. Bush had been to the Britain at least three times, most recently in 1990, when he also visited Spain, Portugal and Morocco. He also said Mr. Bush had visited France, though no date was provided.